Theft

A Love Story

Peter Carey

Published by Faber and Faber

Extract

I

I don't know if my story is grand enough to be a tragedy, although a lot of shitty stuff did happen. It is certainly a love story but that did not begin until midway through the shitty stuff, by which time I had not only lost my eight-year-old son, but also my house and studio in Sydney where I had once been about as famous as a painter could expect in his own backyard. It was the year I should have got the Order of Australia—why not!—look at who they give them to. Instead my child was stolen from me and I was eviscerated by divorce lawyers and gaoled for attempting to retrieve my own best work which had been declared *Marital Assets*.

Emerging from Long Bay Prison in the bleak spring of 1980, I learned I was to be rushed immediately to northern New South Wales where, although I would have almost no money to spend on myself, it was thought that I might, if I could only cut down on my drinking, afford to paint small works and care for Hugh, my damaged 220-pound brother.

My lawyers, dealers, collectors had all come together to save me. They were so kind, so generous. I could hardly

admit that I was fucking sick of caring for Hugh, that I didn't want to leave Sydney or cut down on drinking. Lacking the character to tell the truth I permitted myself to set off on the road they had chosen for me. Two hundred miles north of Sydney, at Taree, I began to cough blood into a motel basin. Thank Christ, I thought, they can't make me do it now.

But it was only pneumonia and I did not die after all.

It was my biggest collector, Jean-Paul Milan, who had designed the plan wherein I would be the unpaid caretaker of a country property he had been trying to sell for eighteen months. Jean-Paul was the proprietor of a chain of nursing homes which were later investigated by the Health Commission, but he also liked to paint and his architect had made him a studio whose riverside wall opened like a lube-bay door. The natural light, as he had so sweetly warned me, even as he made his gift, was perhaps a little green, a 'fault' produced by the ancient casuarinas that lined the river. I might have told him that this issue of natural light was bullshit, but again I held my tongue. That first night out of gaol, at a miserably wine-free dinner with Jean-Paul and his wife, I agreed that we had tragically turned our backs on natural light, candlelight, starlight, and it was true that the Kabuki had been superior in candlelight and that the paintings of Manet were best seen by light of a dusty window, but fuck it—my work would live or die in galleries and I needed 240 reliable volts of alternating current to do my stuff. I was now destined to live in a 'paradise' where I could be sure of no such thing.

Jean-Paul, having so generously given us his house, began immediately to fret that I might somehow hurt it. Or perhaps the true alarmist was his wife who had, long ago, caught me blowing my snotty nose into her dinner napkin. In any case, it was only six mornings after we first arrived in Bellingen that Jean-Paul burst into the house and woke me. This was a nasty shock at almost every level, but I held my

tongue and made him coffee. Then for two hours I followed him around the property as if I were his dog and every stupid thing he told me I wrote down in my notebook, an old leather-bound volume that was as precious to me as life itself. Here I had recorded every colour mix I had made from the time of my so-called breakthrough show in 1971. It was a treasure house, a diary, a record of decline and fall, a history. Thistles, said Jean-Paul. I wrote 'thistles' in my lovely book. Mowing. I spelled it out. Fallen trees across the river. Stihl chain saw. Grease nipples on the slasher. Then he was offended by the tractor parked beneath the house. The woodpile was untidy—I set Hugh to stack it neatly in the pattern Jean-Paul preferred. Finally my patron and I arrived at the studio together. He removed his shoes as if he meant to pray. I followed suit. He raised the big lube-bay door to the river and stood for a long moment looking down at the Never Never, talking—this is not made up—about Monet's fucking *Water Lilies*. He had very pretty feet, I had noticed them before, very white and high-arched. He was in his mid-forties but his toes were straight as a baby's.

Although he owned some twenty nursing homes, Jean-Paul was not personally a great one for touching, but here in the studio, he laid his hand on my forearm.

'You'll be happy here, Butcher.'

'Yes.'

He gazed around the long high room, then began to brush those rich, perfect feet across the soft surface of the floor. If his eyes had not been so moist he would have looked like an athlete preparing for some sci-fi track event.

'Coachwood,' he said, 'isn't it something?'

He meant the floor, and it was truly lovely, a washed pumice grey. It was also a rare rain-forest timber, but who was I, a convicted criminal, to argue ethics?

'How I envy you,' he said.

And so it went, by which I mean that I was as docile as a

big old Labrador quietly farting by the fire. I could have begged him for canvas, and he would have given it to me, but he would have wanted a painting. It was that picture, the one I was not going to give him, that I was thinking of right now. He didn't know it, but I still had about twelve yards of cotton duck, that was two good pictures before I was forced to use Masonite. I quietly sipped the non-alcoholic beer he had brought me as a gift.

'Good isn't it?'

'Like the real thing.'

Then, finally, the last instructions were issued, the promises all given. I stood beneath the studio and watched him bounce his rent-a-car across the cattle grid. He bottomed out as he hit the bitumen, and then he was gone.

Fifteen minutes later I was in the village of Bellingen, introducing myself to the blokes at the Dairyman's Co-op. I bought some plywood, a hammer, a carpenter's saw, two pounds of two-inch Sheetrock screws, twenty 150W incandescent floods, five gallons of Dulux jet black, the same of white, and all this, together with some odds and ends, I charged to Jean-Paul's account. Then I went home to set up the studio.

Later everyone would get in a bloody uproar because I had supposedly *vandalized* the coachwood with the Sheetrock screws, but I can't see how else I could have laid the ply on top of it. Certainly, it could not work the way it was. I was there to paint as everybody knew, and the floor of a painter's studio should be like a site of sacrifice, stabbed by staples, but also tended, swept, scrubbed, washed clean after every encounter. I laid cheap grey linoleum on top of the ply and coated it with linseed oil until it stank like a fresh *pietà*. But still I could not work. Not yet.

Jean-Paul's prizewinning architect had designed a studio with a high-arched roof and this he had tensioned with steel cables like the strings on a bow. It was a bloody wonder of a

thing, and I suspended banks of incandescent floodlights from the cables which pretty much eliminated both the elegance of his design and the green light coming through the casuarinas. Even with these improvements it was hard to imagine a worse place to make art. It was as buggy as a jungle and the insects stuck to my Dulux paint, marking their death agonies with concentric circles. And of course that big wide door was an open invitation to the little fucks. I went back to the co-op and signed for three of those blue-light insect zappers but that was like a finger in the dyke. All around me was subtropical rainforest, countless trees and insects as yet unnamed, unless by me—you cunt, you little shit—who sabotaged the scrubbed and sanded flatness of my hard-won work. In defence I tacked up ugly flywire but the sections were not wide enough and in despair I had a silk curtain made on credit—Velcro running down its sides and a great heavy sausage of sand along its base. The curtain was a deep, deep blue, and the sausage a rust brown. Now the little saboteurs fell into its sweaty silky crotch and there they died in their thousands every night. I swept them out when I cleaned my floor each morning, but some I saved as life models, for no other reason than drawing is relaxing and I would often, particularly when I had run out of wine, sit at my dining table and slowly fill my notebook with careful grey renditions of their lovely corpses. Sometimes my neighbour Dozy Boylan would name them for me.

By early December my brother Hugh and I were ensconced as the caretakers and we were still there in high summer when my life began its next interesting chapter. Lightning had struck the transformer up on the Bellingen Road and so, once again, there was no good light to work by, and I was paying for my patron's kindness by prettifying the front paddock, hacking with a mattock at the thistles around the FOR SALE sign.

January is the hottest month in northern New South

Wales, and also the wettest. After three days of soaking rain the paddocks were sodden and when I swung the mattock the mud was warm as shit between my toes. Until this day the creek had been gin-clear, a rocky stream rarely more than two feet deep, but the runoff from the saturated earth had now transformed the peaceful stream into a tumescent beast: yellow, turbulent, territorial, rapidly rising to twenty feet, engulfing the wide floodplain of the back paddock and sucking at the very top of the bank on whose edge the chaste studio was, sensibly but not invulnerably, perched on high wooden poles. From here, ten feet above the earth, one could walk out above the edge of the raging river as on a wharf. Jean-Paul, when explaining the house to me, had named this precarious platform 'the Skink' referring to those little Australian lizards who drop their tails when disaster strikes. I wondered if he had noticed that the entire house was constructed on a floodplain.

We had not been in exile very long, six weeks or so, and I remember the day because it was our first flood, also the day when Hugh had arrived home from our neighbours with a Queensland heeler puppy inside his coat. It was difficult enough to look after Hugh without this added complication, not that he was always troublesome. Sometimes he was so bloody smart, so coherent, at other times a wailing gibbering fool. Sometimes he adored me, loudly, passionately, like a whiskery bad-breathed child. But the next day or next minute I would be the Leader of the Opposition and he would lay in wait amongst the wild lantana, pounce, wrestle me violently into the mud, or the river, or across the engorged wet-season zucchini. I did not need a sweet puppy. I had Hugh the Poet and Hugh the Murderer, Hugh the Idiot Savant, and he was heavier and stronger, and once he had me down I could only control him by bending his little finger as if I meant to snap it. We neither of us required a dog.

I severed the roots of perhaps a hundred thistles, split a

little ironbark, fired up the stove which heated the water for the Japanese soaking tub and, having discovered that Hugh was asleep and the puppy missing, I retreated out on to the Skink, watching the colours of the river, listening to the boulders rolling over each other beneath the Never Never's bruised and swollen skin. Most particularly, I observed my neighbour's duck ride up and down the yellow flood whilst I felt the platform quiver like a yacht mast tensing under thirty knots of wind.

Somewhere the puppy was barking. It must have been overstimulated by the duck, perhaps imagined it was itself a duck—that seems quite likely now I think of it. The rain had never once relented and my shorts and T-shirt were soaked and I suddenly understood that if I removed them I would feel a good deal more comfortable. So there I was, uncharacteristically deaf to the puppy, squatting naked as a hippy above the surging flood, a butcher, a butcher's son, surprised to find myself three hundred miles from Sydney and so unexpectedly happy in the rain, and if I looked like a broad and hairy wombat, well so be it. It was not that I was in a state of bliss, but I was, for a moment anyway, free from my habitual agitation, the melancholy memory of my son, the anger that I had to paint with fucking Dulux. I was very nearly, almost, for sixty seconds, at peace, but then two things happened at once and I have often thought that the first of them was a kind of omen that I might well have paid attention to. It only took a moment: it was the puppy, speeding past borne on the yellow tide.

Later, in New York, I would see a man jump in front of the Broadway Local. There he was. Then he wasn't. It was impossible to believe what I had seen. In the case of the dog, I don't know what I felt, nothing as simple as pity. Incredulity, of course. Relief—no dog to care for. Anger—that I would have to deal with Hugh's ill-proportioned grief.

With what plan in mind I do not know, I began struggling

with my wet clothes, and thus, accidentally, had a clear view, beneath the studio, of my front gate where, some twenty yards beyond the cattle grid, I saw the second thing: a black car, its headlights blazing, sunk up to its axles in the mud.

There was no justifiable reason for me to be angry about potential buyers except that the timing was bad and, fuck it, I did not like them sticking their nose in my business or presuming to judge my painting or my housekeeping. But I, the previously famous artist, was now the caretaker so, having forced myself back into my cold and unpleasantly resistant clothes, I slopped slowly through the mud to the shed where I fired up the tractor. It was a Fiat and although its noisy differential had rapidly damaged my hearing, I retained a ridiculous affection for the yellow beast. Perched high upon its back, as ridiculous in my own way as Don Quixote, I headed out towards my stranded visitor.

On a better day I might have seen the Dorrigo escarpment towering three thousand feet above the car, mist rising out of the ancient unlogged bush, newborn clouds riding high in powerful thermals which any glider pilot would feel in the pit of his stomach, but now the mountains were hidden, and I could see no more than my fence line and the invading headlights. The windows of the Ford were fogged so even at the distance of ten yards I could make out no more of the interior than the outlines of the AVIS tag on the rear-view mirror. This was confirmation enough that the person was a buyer and I prepared myself to be polite in the face of arrogance. I do, however, have a tendency to bristle and when no one emerged from the car to greet me, I began to wonder what Sydney fuck thought he could block my distinguished driveway and then wait for me to serve him. I dismounted and thumped my fist on the roof.

Nothing happened for almost a minute. Then the engine

fired and the foggy window descended to unveil a woman in her early thirties with straw-coloured hair.

'Are you Mr Boylan?' She had a strange accent.

'No,' I said. She had almond eyes, lips almost too large for her slender face. She appeared unusual, but very attractive, so it is strange, you might think—given my miserable existence and almost continual horniness—how powerfully and deeply she irritated me.

She looked out the window, surveying the front and back wheels which she had spun deep into my land.

'I'm not dressed for this,' she said.

If she had apologized perhaps I would have reacted differently, but she actually rolled the windows up and shouted instructions at me from the other side.

Well, I had been famous once but now I was just a dogsbody, so what did I expect? I wrapped the free end of the Fiat's cable around the Ford's back axle, an exercise which covered me with mud and perhaps a little cowshit too. Then, returning to my tractor, I dropped it into low ratio and hit the gas. Of course she had left the car in gear so this manoeuvre created two long streaks across the grass and out on to the road.

I saw no reason to say goodbye. I retrieved the cable from the Ford and drove back to the shed without looking over my shoulder.

As I returned to my studio I saw she had not gone at all but was walking across the paddock, high heels in her hand, towards my house.

This was the hour at which I normally drew and as my visitor approached I sharpened up my pencils. The river was roaring like blood in my ears but I could feel her feet as she came up the hardwood stairs, a kind of fluttering across the floor joists.

I heard her call but when neither Hugh nor I responded

she set off along the covered walkway suspended between house and studio, a whippy ticklish little structure some ten feet above the ground. She might have chosen to knock on the studio door, but there was also a very narrow walkway, a kind of gangplank which snaked around the outer wall of the studio and so she appeared in front of the open lube-bay door, standing outside the silk, the river at her back.

'Sorry, it's me again.'

I affected great concentration on my pencils.

'Can I use your phone?'

At that moment the electricity returned, flooding the studio with bright light. There stood a slender blonde woman behind a veil of stocking silk. She had mud up to her pretty calves.

'Strong work,' she said.

'You can't come in.'

'Don't worry. I wouldn't track mud into a studio.'

Only later did I think how few civilians would have put it quite like that. At the time I was concerned with simpler things: that she had not come to buy the property, that she was exceedingly attractive and in need of help. I led her back across the walkway to Jean-Paul's 'house of few possessions' where the only real room was a central kitchen with a square table made from Tasmanian blackwood which I was required—his final instruction—to scrub each morning. The table had more character than when Jean-Paul last saw it—cadmium yellow, crimson rose, curry, wine, beef fat, clay—over a month of domestic life now partially obscured by a huge harvest of pumpkins and zucchinis amongst which I now finally located the telephone.

'No dial tone,' I said. 'I'm sure they're working on it.'

Hugh began stirring in his room. I remembered that his dog had drowned. It had completely slipped my mind.

My visitor had remained on the other side of the flywire door. 'I'm so sorry,' she said. 'I can see you have more

important things to worry about.' She was drenched, her short yellow hair all matted, like a little chicken saved from drowning.

I opened the door.

'We are used to mud in this part of the house,' I said. She hesitated, shivering. She looked like she should be put in a little cardboard box before the fire.

'Perhaps you'd like some dry clothes and a warm shower?'

She could not have known what a peculiarly intimate thing I was offering. You see, Jean-Paul's bathroom was on the back porch and here we hairy men were used to showering, almost alfresco, with nothing but flywire separating us from the roaring river, the bending trees. It was easily the best part of our exile. Once we were clean we would climb into that big Japanese wooden tub where the hot water cooked us as red as crayfish while, on a day like today at least, the rain beat across our faces.

On the public side, by the open stairs—really just a fire escape—there were canvas blinds and these I now lowered. I gave her our one clean towel, a dry shirt, a sarong.

'If you use the tub,' I said, 'you can't use soap in it.'

'*Domo arigato*,' she called. 'I know how to behave.'

Domo arigato? It would be six months before I would learn what that might mean. I was thinking I should have told Hugh about the damn puppy, but I did not need his outbursts now. I returned to my table full of pumpkins and sat, quiet as a mouse, on the noisy chair. She was looking for Dozy Boylan—who else? There were no other Boylans, and I knew she would have no hope of driving her rent-a-car across his flooded creek. I began to think about what I could cook for dinner.

Having no desire to set off Hugh, I remained silently at the table while she bathed. I rose only once, to fetch a cloth and some moisturizing cream and with this I began to clean

her Manolo Blahniks. Who would have believed me? I must have paid for two dozen pairs in the last year of my marriage, but this was the first time I had actually touched a pair and I was shocked by the indecent softness of the leather. The wood shifted and crackled in the firebox of the Rayburn stove. If I have made myself sound calculating, let me tell you: I had not the least fucking idea what I was doing.

2

Hearing the screen door in the bathroom give a small urgent 'thwack', I hid the shoes beneath the table and hurried around collecting muddy pumpkins, stacking them out on the front porch. Not that I didn't notice her enter, or see my Kmart shirt falling loosely from her slender shoulders, the collar's soft grey shadow across her bath-pink neck.

I handed her the cordless phone. 'Telecom are back in service.' Brusque. It has been remarked of me before—the lack of charm when sober.

'Oh super,' she said.

She threw her towel across a wooden chair and walked briskly out on to the front porch. Above the insistent thrum on the roof I could hear the soft American burr which I understood as old money, East Coast, but all this was Aussie expertise i.e. from the movies and I had not the least idea of who she was, and if she had been Hilda the Poisoner from Spoon Forks, North Dakota, I would have had no clue.

I began to chop up a big pumpkin, a lovely thing, fire orange with a rust-brown speckle, and a moist secret cache of bright slippery seeds which I scooped into the compost tray.

Out on the porch, I heard her: 'Right. Yes. Exactly. Bye.'

She returned, all antsy, rubbing at her hair.

'He says his creek is over the big rock.' (She pronounced it 'crick'.) 'He says you'll understand.'

'It means you wait for the "crick" to go down.'

'I can't wait,' she said. 'I'm sorry.'

It was exactly at that moment—well I'm fucking sorry Miss, but what do you want me to do about the flood?—that Hugh's adenoidal breathing pushed its way between us. Doughy, six foot four, filthy, dangerous-looking, he filled the doorway without explanation. He had his pants on, but his hair looked like cattle had been eating it and he was unshaven. Our guest was three feet in front of him but it was to me he spoke. 'Where's the bloody pup?'

I was at the far side of the stove, hands slippery with olive oil, laying the pumpkin and potato in a baking tray.

'This is Hugh,' I said. 'My brother.'

Hugh looked her up and down, very Hugh-like, threatening if you did not know.

'What's your name?'

'I'm Marlene.'

'Have you', he enquired, sticking out his fat lower lip, and folding his big arms across his chest, 'read the book *The Magic Pudding*?'

Oh Christ, I thought, not this.

She rubbed her hair again. 'As a matter of fact, Hugh, I *have* read *The Magic Pudding*. Twice.'

'Are you American?'

'That's very hard to say.'

'Hard to say.' His self-inflicted haircut was high above his ears suggesting a fierce and rather monkish kind of character. 'But you have read *The Magic Pudding*?'

Now she offered all of her attention. 'Yes. Yes, I have.'

Hugh gave me a fast look. I understood exactly—he would now be busy for a moment, but he had not forgotten this business with the dog.

'Who', he asked, turning his brown eyes to the foreigner, 'do you like the best in *The Magic Pudding*?'

And she was charmed. 'I like the four of them.'

'Really?' He was dubious. 'Four?'

'Including the pudding.'

'You're counting the pudding!'

'But I like *all* the drawings.' She finally returned the phone to the table and began to properly dry her hair. 'The pudding thieves', she said, 'are priceless.'

'Is that a joke you're telling?' My brother hated the pudding thieves. He was continually, loudly, passionately regretful that it was not possible for him to punch the possum on the snout.

'It's not the characters I like'—she paused—'but the *drawings*—I think they're better than any painting Lindsay ever did.'

'Oh yes,' said Hugh, softening. 'We saw Lindsay's bloody paintings. Bless me.'

Whatever urgent business had been in her mind, she put it briefly to one side. 'Do you want to know my favourite person in *The Magic Pudding*?'

'Yes.'

'Sam Sawnoff.'

'He's not a person.'

'Yes, he's a penguin, but he's very good, I think.'

And there she was—a type—one of those rare, often unlucky people who 'get on with Hugh'.

'Who do you like?' she asked, smiling.

'Barnacle Bill!' he cried exultantly. And next thing he was out of the doorway, shadow-boxing, prancing round the table crying: 'Mitts up, mitts up, you dirty pudding thieves!'

Jean-Paul's little house of few possessions was, as I said, a light and whippy structure, designed with no anticipation of hulking prancing men in muddy work boots. The cups and saucers rattled on their shelves. None of this seemed to put

her out at all. Hugh put his arm around my chest. Misunderstanding, she continued smiling.

'Where's my bloody dog?' my brother hissed.

Up close like this, his breath was really awful.

'Later, Hugh.'

'Shut up.' There was the missing front tooth and all that tartar but since Dr Hoffman was deported, there was no dentist brave enough to tackle Hugh.

'Later, please.'

But he was hard against my back, with his whiskery jowls against my cheek. He was a strong man of thirty-four and when he moved his huge arm around my throat I could hardly breathe.

'Your puppy drowned.'

I saw my visitor suck in her breath.

'It drowned, mate,' I said.

He let go his grip but I watched him very closely. Our Hugh could be a devious chap and I didn't want to cop that famous roundhouse punch.

He stepped back, stricken, and that really was my prime concern, to get beyond his reach.

'Careful of the bath heater,' I said, but he had already stumbled, sat on it, cried with pain, and rushed head down into his room.

Singed feathers, I thought, recalling the rooster in *The Magic Pudding*.

Moaning, Hugh slammed his door. He threw himself on to his bed and as the house shook and rattled the visitor's clear blue eyes widened. How could I explain? All my brother's misery was painfully present and nothing could be said in private.

'Can I walk across the creek?' she asked.

Five minutes later we were out in the storm together.

The tractor headlights were weak and the ride very loud and rough, no more than 20 Ks, but the wind was off the

escarpment and the rain stung my face and doubtless hers as well. She had borrowed my oilskin coat and a pair of gum boots but her hair would, by now, be wild and curling, her eyes slitted against the rain.

For the first mile and a half, that is, all the way to Dozy Boylan's cattle grid, I was very aware of that slender body, the small breasts against my back. I was half mad, you see that, a dangerous male in rut, in a fury with my brother, roaring around Loop Road, the slasher swaying and rattling, the differential whining in my ears.

As we arrived at the grid, my weak yellow lights fell upon the boiling water of Sweetwater Creek, more usually a narrow stream. Jean-Paul's big slasher—what I would call a mower—was attached to the power takeoff and three-point hydraulics. I raised it as high as it would go, a big square raft of metal about six foot by six foot. I should have removed it, but I was a painter and in matters agricultural my judgement was bad in almost every way imaginable. I had it firmly in my mind that the little creek was nothing serious but entering the flood my boots were immediately filled with cold water and then it was too late, and the Fiat was rising and stumbling across the hidden rocks. Then the current caught the slasher and I felt a sick surge in my gut as we began to drift. I steered upstream, of course, but the tractor was slipping down, lumbering over the boulders, front wheels rearing in the air. I was no farmer, never had been. The mower was a deadly orange barge riding on the surface of the flood. I could feel my passenger's terror as she dug into my shoulders and saw clearly, angrily, what a complete fool I was. I had put my life at risk, for what? I did not even like her.

Bless us, as Hugh would say.

Luck or God being with us, we emerged on the far bank and I lowered the mower for the journey up Dozy's steep drive. Marlene said nothing, but when we arrived at the front door, when Dozy came out to greet her, she shed my

raincoat, urgently, desperately, as if she never wished it to touch her again. I had no doubt she was afraid, and in the tangled skin she handed me I imagined I could feel her anger with my recklessness.

'You better take that slasher off,' said Dozy. 'I'll babysit it for a day or two.'

Dozy was a rich and successful manufacturer who had, with all the energy and will that marked his character, turned himself into a broad sixty-year-old man with a grey moustache and a strong farmer's belly. He was also a gifted amateur entomologist, but that was not the point right now, and as his guest took refuge inside his house he fetched a fierce flashlight and held it silently while I disconnected the mower from the hydraulics.

'Hugh alone?'

'I'll be back soon.'

My friend said nothing judgemental, but he caused me to imagine Hugh howling across paddocks, barbed wire in the dark, rabbit holes, the river, his terror that I was dead and he was left alone.

'I would have got her in the Land-Rover,' Dozy said, 'but she was in a great awful rush and I was listening to the BBC news.'

He said nothing about her attractiveness, leading me to conclude that she was one of the nieces or grandchildren he had spread out across the world.

'I'm fine now.' And I was, in a way. I would go home and feed Hugh, tune in his wireless, and make sure he took his bloody tablet. Then we would talk about his dog.

Once, not so long ago, I had been a happy married man tucking in his boy at night.